

ring preferably squeezes the channel 138, decreasing the diameter of the channel 138 and constricting flow. The valve 139 may also include a flow sensor to detect the volume of fluid that has passed through the valve 139 to regulate the expansion and retraction of the cavities 125a and 125b. The valve 139 is preferably arranged within the sheet 111, as shown in FIGS. 8a-8d, but may alternatively be located outside of the sheet 111, as shown in FIG. 14. However, any other suitable orientation of the valve 139 may be used.

[0039] Alternatively, the displacement device 130 may include two fluid outlets and may function to displace fluid to a first fluid outlet to a first channel 138 coupled to the first cavity 125a and displace fluid to a second fluid outlet to a second channel 138 coupled to a second cavity 125b. In this variation, the selective expansion of the first and second cavities 125a and 125b is a direct result of the displacement of fluid caused by the displacement device 130 and not the result of redirecting the displaced fluid. The user interface system may also include a first displacement device 130 that functions to displace fluid to the first cavity 125a and a second displacement device 130 that functions to displace fluid to the second cavity 125b. Alternatively, the first and second displacement devices 130 may cooperate to control the flow of fluid into one or both of the cavities 125a and 125b. For example, in the variation where each of the plurality of cavities 125 expands with a different volume or pressure change, the first displacement device 130 may provide the volume or pressure change necessary to expand a first cavity 125a and the second displacement device 130 may provide the additional volume or pressure change necessary to expand a second cavity 125b. The first and second displacement devices 130 are preferably identical, but may alternatively have different fluid displacement properties to accommodate to different relative locations of the first and second cavities 125a and 125b and/or different geometries of the first and second cavities 125a and 125b. However, any other suitable arrangement of displacement devices 130 and first and second cavities 125a and 125b may be used.

[0040] The second preferred embodiment preferably includes a processor that controls the displacement device 130 and the valve 139. The processor preferably determines if only one or both of the cavities 125a and 125b are to be expanded and actuates the displacement device 130 to displace the suitable volume of fluid to expand one or both of the cavities 125a and 125b to the desired amount as well as actuates the valve 139 to direct the fluid to the desired cavities 125a and 125b. In the second preferred embodiment, the volume of fluid that is displaced may be controlled by controlling the length of time that the displacement device 130 is actuated as described in the first embodiment, but may also be controlled by actuation of the valve 139 to direct fluid in any one direction. For example, in the bi-state variation of the valve 139, the fluid flow through the channel 138 may be a constant rate and the processor may actuate the valve 139 into the OPEN state for a period of time to allow the desired volume of fluid to flow through. Alternatively, the system 100 may include a flow sensor located within the cavity 125, valve 139, the channel 138, and/or the reservoir 133 that detects the increase in volume of the fluid and/or the flow of fluid into the cavity 125 to determine whether the adequate amount of flow or change in volume and/or pressure has been completed. Alternatively, the displacement device 130 may function to provide a constant pressure within the fluid network 200. Once a valve 139 is in the OPEN state, fluid may flow into the

cavity 125 corresponding to the valve 139 and the overall pressure within the fluid network 200 may decrease and the displacement device 130 is then actuated to increase the pressure within the fluid network 200 to the desired pressure, filling the cavity 125. To drain fluid from an expanded cavity 125, the displacement device 130 may function to decrease the pressure within the fluid network 200 to facilitate draining of fluid from the cavity 125. However, the processor may regulate the volume of fluid that is displaced into the cavities 125a and 125b with any other suitable method. Regulating the amount of flow or change in volume and/or pressure provided by the displacement device 130 may prevent or help decrease the over-expansion or over-retraction of the cavities 125. This regulation also allows for the possibility of varying degrees of expansion or retraction of individual cavities 125, for example, a half expanded state and a fully expanded state, depending on the type of user interface scenario.

3. Third Preferred Embodiment

Selective Expansion of Groups

[0041] In the third preferred embodiment, as shown in FIGS. 14-15, a first group of cavities 125 and a second group of cavities 125 are selectively expanded. Similar to the second preferred embodiment, the displacement device 130 of the third preferred embodiment preferably expands the first and second groups of cavities 125 in two modes: a first mode where only one of the first and second groups of cavities 125 is expanded, and a second mode where both of the first and second groups of cavities 125 are expanded. Alternatively, the displacement device 130 may expand only one of the first and second groups 125 at any one time. Each group of cavities 125 are preferably arranged as described in the first preferred embodiment and preferably functions to provide a particular interface for the user and preferably includes a number of cavities 125 suitable for the application, for example, a number dial pad or a QWERTY keyboard. The groups of cavities 125 may be placed adjacent to one another (for example, a QWERTY keyboard group adjacent to a number dial pad group, as shown in FIG. 15a) and/or interspersed with one another (for example, the QWERTY keyboard group is interleaved with the number pad group, as shown in FIG. 15b). In this variation, the branches of the channel 138 that couple each of the cavities 125 to the displacement device 130 may be arranged along different height levels within the sheet 111, as shown in FIG. 16. This may allow for the branches of the channel 138 to be arranged within a sheet in with a surface 115 of a lower surface area and/or allow each of the plurality of cavities 125 to be placed in closer proximity to each other. The branches of the channel 138 may be arranged in one of a variety of arrangements. In a first example, the branches coupling the cavities of the first group of cavities 125 to the displacement device 130 may be placed along a first height level within the sheet in and the branches coupling the cavities of the second group of cavities 125 to the displacement device 130 may be placed along another height level within the sheet 111. In a second example, the branches leading to each cavity 125 within one group of cavities 125 may be arranged on different height levels within the sheet 111. In a third example, the branches coupling a first subset of the cavities within a group of cavities 125 to the displacement device 130 may be arranged on a first height level within the sheet in and the branches coupling a second subset of the cavities within the group of cavities 125 to the displacement device 130 may